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ABSTRACT

Involving middle school students in decision making is an important way to make them feel that they are part of the educational process in their school, that they are part of the "school team." A key way to involve students is through the creation of a Student Advisory Board (SAB), such as the one in place at Schmucker Middle School in Mishawaka, Indiana. Usually one boy and one girl are elected to the SAB from each classroom, and they meet on a monthly basis with four teacher advisors to discuss student comments, complaints, and concerns about field trips, dances, scheduling, and class activities. The SAB student members solicit comments from their classrooms before each monthly meeting and discuss the results of the meeting with their classrooms immediately afterward. The SAB takes up very little class time and provides all students with a sense of ownership and involvement. It also provides feedback to teachers and allows both students and teachers to air complaints and relieve stress. (MDM)

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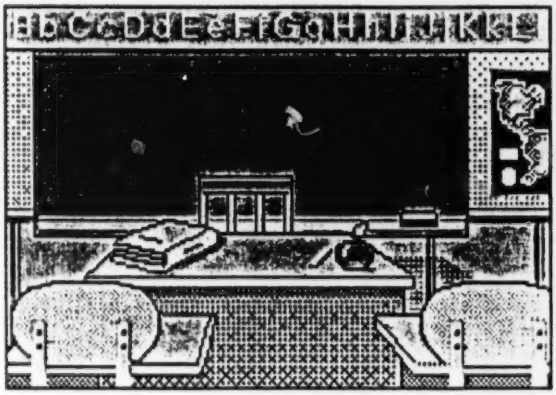

INVOLVEMENT
the key to
SUCCESS

Involving students in the Student Advisory Board

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The following is a synopsis of my November 5, 1993 National Middle School Association Conference presentation.

Involvement: the Key to Success in the Teaming Process

by
Wes Doi
Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation
Schmucker Middle School
Mishawaka, Indiana

We recognize that there are many positives of teaching at the middle school level beyond the curriculum requirements. "Together We Can Make a Difference sung this morning by the Roosevelt Middle School choir relays that feeling. Sharing and helping in the middle school process makes teaching eighth graders enjoyable.

"People tend to resist that which is forced upon them. People tend to support that which they help to create." So quoted Elliot Merenbloom in his Portland presentation. This quote is the essence of the positive interaction within a middle school team. Creating a feeling of ownership by the participants of the team allows each member to be part of the "creation" of many team activities or ideas. This ownership is developed by the involvement of all persons on the team.

The many elements of the team, teachers, students and parents, can all be important parts of the whole teaming process. Through twenty-two years of teaching at the middle school level the realization that teaching is much more enjoyable when all parts work together rather than conflict over educational concerns. Parents can be active in the education of their children by becoming involved in Parent-Teacher Associations, Open House activities, and by volunteering to participate in school. At my school, Schmucker Middle School in Mishawaka, Indiana, parents are very involved. Our school corporation, Penn-Harris-Madison, promotes parent and community participation in the student education system. As a core team, information letters, "Midsummers Messed and frequent parent/teacher conferences allow parents open communication with the teachers. The total emphasis is aimed to involve parents.

Teachers, too, need to have ownership in the team activities. Not only do teachers need to voice opinions, but they must also take an active role in planning and preparing for those activities. The use of a management structure, as is shown on the following page, can give each member of the teaching team the responsibility of ownership. Professionally, teachers take active roles in parent/teacher conferences, in afternoons and out-of-school programs, and the PTA . Together with parents, teachers become vital elements of the teaming process.

The emphasis of my presentation is the involvement of students as an important part of the team. Our team continually reminds students of their importance to the team, and the value of their input. Suggestion boxes are available in all team classrooms. Team student activities such as cheerblocks, dress-up days, and competitions involve children. Large group team discussions are periodically held to allow student comments. The key way to involve students is the **Student Advisory Board**. This elected body, which our core team has used the past four years, is shown in action on the videotape, and the significant steps are outlined on the following pages. This should not be confused with the Advisor/Advisee programs, which hot topic in middle school today.

Why is the Advisory Board valuable? The main reason is to involve the students. Secondary benefits include:

1. The involvement teaches the students about the "change" process.
2. The amount of criticism is diminished, because the students help create much that the team does (peer involvement).
3. A contented atmosphere is created through the diffusion of anxiety and stress through the student led discussions with all classes (the pre-lunch meeting).
4. The Student Advisory Board develops better student/teacher relations and communication barriers (it breaks down walls).

The following pages outline the structure of how we develop and use the **Student Advisory Board**.

As can be seen on the following pages, we spend twenty minutes of class time and one lunch hour per month, and the benefits far outweigh the few sacrifices. Try the **Student Advisory Board.** You'll see the results!

Every participant in the teaming process is important, and involving

each person will create a positive atmosphere. Our school enrollment of 1427 sometimes magnifies stressful situations, but a contented team can soothe much of that anxiety and make our school an enjoyable educational setting. Every person involved needs to keep in mind the purpose of our schools, which to help each student succeed and perform to the best of his/her ability. We are in this profession to help the student.

Team 8C Management structure:

Team 8C teachers:

Wes Doi
Jennifer Bryant
Brendan Hess
Mindy O'Malley

Chair- Wes
- conduct meetings
- share information

Budget- Jennifer
- submit orders
- audit accounts
- distribute supplies

Publication-Wes
- typing
  - schedules
  - lists

Contact-Wes
- inform of changes
- conference surveys

Fieldtrip Director-Mindy
- oversee all fieldtrips
  - turn in requests
  - inform specialists
  - student lists
  - inform office
  - buses
  - finance

Enrichment Director- Mindy
- oversee Enrichment Program
  - changes
  - curriculum
  - courses of study

Student Recognition Director- Brendan
- get well
- new student } Welcome Wagon
- good bye

Team Activities Director- Brendan

Cross team or grade level Director-Jennifer

Advisory Board-Wes

The Student Advisory Board
Schmucker Middle School
Mishawaka, IN

THE PROCESS

1. A student board member election is held in each classroom. One boy and one girl is elected to represent each class.

2. The day prior to the lunch meeting, Advisory Board members lead their classes in a ten minute discussion of suggestions, comments, and concerns.

3. The last Friday of each month the Advisory Board meets at lunch with the team teachers to discuss student comments.

4. The following Monday, Advisory Board members report back to their class for ten minutes.

5. Student Advisory Board members are asked to return from the high school as guest speakers, discussing preparation for ninth grade.

Student Advisory Board
Procedure Outline

Election: -2 per class
-No restriction on who is elected (suggest one boy, one girl)
-For the year

Classroom information gathering:
-Meet one day prior to lunch meeting
-Ten minutes
-No teacher present
-Student Advisory Board member leads discussion
take notes
-Too loud = reminder of possibility of losing discussion time
-Open to suggestions given by classmates

Lunch Advisory Board:
-One day per month
-Private room
-Teachers and board together
-Each pair of board members goes over concerns and suggestions (positive and negative) of their class, followed by response from teachers. Board members take notes from discussion, which is not a debate or attack on board members or teachers-only an explanation.
-Discussion of possible activities:
"out-of-school" fun activities
sand volleyball
fieldtrips
bowling outings
baseball games
dance recitals
play
"in-school" team activities
flexible schedules
fieldtrips
major in class activities or projects

It is vital that board members are not put "in the middle". This is done by continually reminding the board members of their role as spokespersons, who are not necessarily responsible or in agreement with a classroom or teacher comment. Additionally, the board members are encouraged to

explain to the class that they are only reporting a teacher reaction. Finally, board members are cautioned not to show a prejudice when reporting to classmates.

Reporting: -One day following the lunch meeting
-Ten minutes
-No teacher
-Board Member led discussion
-Report teacher responses
-Field and note student rebuttal

Total classtime used= 20 minutes per month and one lunch period.

Benefits gained:
1. Student ownership and involvement
2. Teachers are better informed of student ideas and attitudes
3. Students are better informed of the purpose of teaching activities
4. Teacher self-evaluation
5. Student understanding
6.*RELIEVES STRESS, both teacher and student. It is a vehicle to "let off some steam".**

The following pages are samples of outlines used for the videotape interviews of teachers and students. They are intended to clarify statements made by the person interviewed.

Advisory Board interview:

Begin with:
Hello, my name is __(first name only)__. I' m a __(year)__ at

__(school)__. I served as an Advisory Board member during the 1990-91
1991-92
(pick one) 1992-93
school year.

Answer as honestly as you can:

1. How did you feel while you served as an Advisory Board member?
   discuss -Was it worthwhile?
   -How were you accepted by your classmates?
   -Were your ideas and opinions heard and understood?
   -by students
   -by teachers
   -How did you feel about the the teacher reactions?

2. Now that your service as an Advisory Board member is past, what do you remember being the best part of serving and the worst part of serving?

3. Please add any additional comments or feelings you would like to make concerning the Advisory Board.

Advisory Board Teacher interview:

Begin with:
Hello, my name is (first name only) . I teach (year/subject) at (school) .

Answer as honestly as you can:

1. Discuss some of the benefits encountered when you worked with the student Advisory Board.

discuss
- -Was it worthwhile?
- -How did it affect your classes?
- -Were your ideas and opinions heard and understood?
  - -by students
- -How did you feel about the the student reactions?

2. Discuss some of the problems encountered while working with the student Advisory board.

3. Please add any additional comments or feelings you would like to make concerning the Advisory Board.